

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8417

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL OPORTO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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USMISSION NATO

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USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

COMUSFORAZ LAJES FLD AZORES

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 6041

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER ON AZORES BASE NEGOTIATIONS

SUMMARY: FONMIN MEDEIROS FERREIRA HAS STATED THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO BEGIN LAJES BASE NEGOTIATIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, CITING ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES OF THE AZOREAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AS AN IMPORTANT REASON FOR STARTING TALKS QUICKLY. HE SAID THE AZOREAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT USE OF THE BASE SINCE THE AGREEMENT EXPIRED IN 1974. APPEARING ON EVE OF PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO AZORES, FONMIN'S INTERVIEW CONSTITUTES AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S POSTURE. HIS ASSERTION THAT GOP IS PREPARED TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS ASAP IS
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PROBABLY DESIGNED TO DIVERT ANY AZOREAN DISCONTENT FROM

GOP TO USG IF TALKS SHOULD BE DELAYED. END SUMMARY.

1. IN SEPTEMBER 3 "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS" (DN) INTERVIEW,
FONMIN MEDEIROS FERREIRA STATED:

BEGIN QUOTE:

QUESTION: "WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING WITH RESPECT
TO THE LAJES BASE?"

ANSWER: "THE AGREEMENT ON LAJES IS IN TRUTH THE RESULT
OF A COMBINATION OF TWO AGREEMENTS. THE FIRST AN
AGREEMENT OF MUTUAL DEFENSE ASSISTANCE BETWEEN
PORTUGAL AND THE UNITED STATES WHICH WAS SIGNED
JANUARY 5, 1951. AND LATER, AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE
PORTUGUESE AND AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS REACHED SEPTEMBER 6,
1951. THE LIFE OF THIS AGREEMENT WHICH ENDED IN
SEPTEMBER 1956 WAS EXTENDED THROUGH A SUPPLEMENTAL
AGREEMENT UNTIL DECEMBER 31, 1962. MEANWHILE, THE UNITED
STATES REMAINED IN LAJES IN A DE FACTO SITUATION
BETWEEN 1962 AND 1971 WITHOUT THERE HAVING BEEN
ANY NEGOTIATION OR ANY NEW AGREEMENT ON THE MATTER.
ON DECEMBER 9, 1971 THERE WAS AN 'ARRANGEMENT' FOR
AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS BETWEEN THE U.S. SECRETARY
OF STATE AND THE PORTUGUESE MINISTER OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS IN WHICH A PROVISIONAL EXTENSION OF THE
AGREEMENT FOR FIVE YEARS WAS ESTABLISHED BEGINNING
ON FEBRUARY 3, 1969. THIS 'ARRANGEMENT' ENDED IN 1974.

"WITH THE APRIL 25 REVOLUTION, AND AT THE TIME
WHEN MARIO SOARES WAS MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT MADE KNOWN TO WASHINGTON
ITS INTEREST IN RESUMING NEGOTIATIONS REGARDING THE
USE OF THE LAJES BASE. HOWEVER, THE DIFFICULTIES
OF THESE TWO YEARS -- THE SUCCESSIVE PROVISIONAL
GOVERNMENTS -- PREVENTED THIS PROBLEM FROM BEING TAKEN UP.

"HOWEVER, IT IS THE INTENTION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL
GOVERNMENT TO CARRY OUT THIS NEGOTIATION AND WE HAVE
ALREADY EXPRESSED THE OPINION THAT THESE CONVERSATIONS
OUGHT TO BEGIN AGAIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. AT LEAST,
THIS IS OUR INTENTION, AND ON THE OTHER HAND, WE
ARE AWARE THAT A RAPID CONCLUSION OF THE LAJES
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AGREEMENT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE AZOREANS GIVEN OUR
ECONOMIC AND EVEN BUDGETARY DIFFICULTIES OF THE
REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE AZORES. THUS AZOREAN
EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE CONCLUSION OF
THE AGREEMENT ARE NATURAL, IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THESE
DIFFICULTIES WHICH ARE EVIDENT, PARTICULARLY IN THE
FIGURES OF THE REGIONAL BUDGET. THE BUDGET COMES
TO 1,200,000 CONTOS (38,472,000 DOLLARS) WHILE LOCAL

RECEIPTS RECEIVED BY THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ARE ONLY 500,000 CONTOS (16,030,000 DOLLARS). THIS GIVES US AN IDEA OF THE IMPORTANCE WHICH THE AZOREAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT WILL CERTAINLY ATTRIBUTE TO RAPID NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN PORTUGAL AND THE U.S.

QUESTION: "WILL THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT BE CONSULTED, OR EVEN PARTICIPATE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS OF THIS AGREEMENT?"

ANSWER: "CERTAINLY. THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT WILL PARTICIPATE IN THESE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH, INCIDENTALLY, IS PROVIDED FOR IN THE CONSTITUTION.

QUESTION: "CAN YOU TELL US AT THIS TIME SOME CONCRETE ELEMENTS UPON WHICH THE AGREEMENT WILL BE BASED, OBVIOUSLY FROM THE PORTUGUESE POINT OF VIEW?"

ANSWER: "FRANKLY I CANNOT ADD ANYTHING ON THAT. AS YOU CAN JUDGE, THIS AGREEMENT INVOLVES BROAD NEGOTIABLE SUBJECT MATTER SO THAT ON OUR PART, WE CAN ONLY AFFIRM THE PRINCIPLES WHICH WILL GUIDE US. THESE ARE OBVIOUSLY THE DEFENSE OF PORTUGUESE SOVEREIGNTY, AZOREAN INTERESTS, AND, LET US SAY, THE SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP WHICH BINDS US TO THE U.S.

QUESTION: "WHEN WILL WE HAVE THESE AGREEMENTS?"

ANSWER: "THAT IS ALSO DIFFICULT TO SAY. THE U.S. IS ENTERING AN ELECTORAL PERIOD SHORTLY SO THAT THE RAPIDITY WITH WHICH THESE AGREEMENTS CAN BE

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CONCLUDED WILL DEPEND VERY MUCH ON THE ABILITY OF
THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION TO RESPOND.

QUESTION: "COULD YOU TELL US A PROBABLE DATE FOR
THE BEGINNING OF THE NEGOTIATIONS?

ANSWER: "THE SOONER THE BETTER FOR US, BUT IT
IS DIFFICULT TO SPECIFY A DATE BECAUSE THIS
PRESUPPOSES AN INTER-RELATIONSHIP AND, APART FROM
OUR WILLINGNESS AND AVAILABILITY, WE HAVE TO FACE
AND UNDERSTAND THE AVAILABILITY OF THE AMERICAN
ADMINISTRATION DURING THE ELECTION PERIOD.
NEVERTHELESS, THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT ON OUR PART
WE ARE NOT READY TO BEGIN THESE NEGOTIATIONS,
BECAUSE IN FACT WE REALLY ARE."

QUESTION: "WILL THE RETROACTIVE NATURE OF THE USE
OF THE LAJES BASE SINCE 1974 BE CONSIDERED IN THE
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COMING NEGOTIATIONS?

ANSWER: "NATURALLY, IT WILL BE. THE PERIOD OF
DE FACTO USE OF THE BASE SINCE THAT DATE, EVEN THOUGH
IT WAS USED WITHOUT ANY AGREEMENT, WILL NOW BE TAKEN
INTO ACCOUNT."
END QUOTE.

2. COMMENT: FONMIN'S SPECIFIC ANSWERS, NOTING DATES,
ETC., DEMONSTRATE THIS WAS A SET-PIECE INTERVIEW.
BOTH PRESIDENT EANES AND PM SOARES WILL BE IN AZORES
TOMORROW (SEPT 4) TO ATTEND FORMAL OPENING OF REGIONAL
ASSEMBLY AND IT WAS PROBABLY FELT THAT GOP'S POSTURE ON
BASE TALKS HAD TO BE SET FORTH BEFOREHAND, TO HANDLE
EXPECTED QUERIES.

3. MEDEIROS FERREIRA'S REMARKS ABOUT GOP READINESS
TO RESUME TALKS ASAP, WITH DEFERRAL POSSIBLY DUE TO
US ELECTIONS, ARE DESIGNED TO PUT ONUS ON US
IF TALKS SHOULD BE DELAYED FOR ANY REASON AND ALSO TO
GET AZOREANS OFF HIS BACK.

4. FONMIN'S POINTING TO "RETROACTIVE UTILIZATION"

OF LAJES BASE INDICATES ONE LINE OF APPROACH GOP CAN
BE EXPECTED TO TAKE IN ARGUING FOR POSSIBLE QUID DURING
FORTHCOMING NEGOTIATIONS.
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